

**"Shamus O'Brien."**

The Broadway Theatre came dangerously near to the Metropolitan Opera House last night. As you sat there in grave expectancy you began to look around for flares, to sniff the patchouli of the horse-shoe, and to hunt about for the long-haired ones. The cause of it all was "Shamus O'Brien," the new "romantic Irish opera," by George H. Jessop and C. Villiers Stanford. Mr. Duff asked it out from the London waters, and brought it over. It was produced for the first time in this country at the Broadway last night. Those who went to fryol were severely rebuked. Those who were there in the firm conviction that life is real, life is earnest—and all that sort of thing—were not disappointed.

It may at once be said that "Shamus O'Brien" is a clever piece of work, with a good substantial, honest, utterly conventional story well told, and a musically, conscientious and uninspired score. What the authors of the opera have missed is the deft, blithe spark of popularity, "Brian Boru," "Shamus's" predecessor, was less clever, less conscientious, and less likely to meet with the approval of the long-haired ones, but it was saturated with popularity, and it appealed strongly to tired bread and butter earners. (Please note that I insist upon metropolitan audiences being composed of tired bread and butter earners out for relaxation.) "Shamus O'Brien" will not, therefore, enter into competition with "Brian Boru."

The story told in the new work is one that we have often seen in the popular price theatres of this city. It is sort of a Chamberlain O'Leary story, without Chamberlain O'Leary. You get the outlandish Shamus, reeking with native humor; a captain of the British army in gorgeous scarlet; a colonel, a piper, a peasant farmer, a traitor-villain, and a chorus of lassies prepared to troop in at a moment's notice and encase Shamus in the centre of the stage. The trials of Shamus and the loyalty of his wife are concisely set forth, with musical interruptions of course, and "Shamus" needs no synopsis. There is not a theatre goer of the ripe age of twelve in this city who could not understand it from beginning to end. That is a merit.

Yet with Dr. Standford's exceedingly pretty music—and some of the numbers are really gems of melody and give examples of what we call "color"—"Shamus O'Brien" drags. It becomes hideous. Both the author and composer have too much to say, and too much time to say it in. They lack the art of condensation. They have music without form—and this will deal "Shamus" its cruelest blow, for no audience will believe that a comic opera is really good if it bores them—that is to say, no audience outside of the Metropolitan Opera House.

"Shamus" is the sort of work of which, when asked for an opinion, you would say: "Excellent! Very fine. Masterly in the extreme." But you wouldn't sit through it more than once. It reminds me of Miss Edgeworth's novels—always held up as samples of propriety and respectability. You advise your sisters to read them and then—sneak off in a corner with something yellow for yourself.

The finale of the first act, however, pleased the audience, and the jig before that dance was picturesque a couple of opera fans as one could wish to see. It was vivaciously and hilariously danced, and the cloud that had been settling upon the spirits of the spectators was quickly dissipated. A song in the second act, sung by the Captain, made an instantaneous hit and was redemanded. It is easy to see throughout "Shamus O'Brien" that Dr. Stanford has tried very hard to steer away from oratorio methods. It was also easy to see that the task was not a facile one, and that when he was "light" he felt somewhat ashamed of himself. If comic operas were written for the special delectation of musical critics "Shamus O'Brien's" fate would not be in doubt for an instant. I have before me printed testimony to the effect that the Liverpool Daily Post, in an editorial, considered it "deservingly one of the most popular operas;" that the Dublin Daily Express, enthused, and that the Dublin Freeman's Journal owned no vocabulary large enough to do the opera justice.

Mr. Duff's imported company made an excellent impression. Denis O'Sullivan was the hero, in a conventional but always agreeable way. His voice, afflicted with a slight vibrato, was nevertheless adequate, and the audience liked him, while the evening was still young. Better work was done by Reginald Roberts and Joseph O'Mara—particularly by the latter—and A. G. Cunningham as the usual black-coated priest also distinguished himself. The men proved to be better than the women. Miss Annie Roberts was somewhat uninteresting, and Miss Carr Shaw—said to be a sister of the fastidious author of "Arms and the Man," acted better than she sang. Mr. Duff triumphed with his chorus—a body of young women exceedingly well drilled, tuneful and comely. When I add that, in addition to all these good points, "Shamus O'Brien" has a poetic stage setting and an irreproachable stage management, you will wonder why I have tempered all this praise by expressions of doubt.

But the demon of popularity tugs at my pen, and tells me not to be too good, because we were none of us too good—except when we were at the Metropolitan Opera House. That demon also tells me to remember "Brian Boru," which I have already recorded as the best comic opera New York has seen this season. And I cannot forget it. I shall not swerve from my allegiance to "Brian." "Shamus" is very nice and clever, but it is not a light entertainment, or one that will bring jollity to the community. ALAN DALE.

**NEW VARIETY THEATRE.**

J. S. Shea, Proprietor of Shea's Music Hall, W. Build One on Upper Third Avenue.

J. S. Shea, proprietor of Shea's Music Hall, in trans-Harlem, has purchased four lots on Third Avenue, between One Hundred and Fifty-second and One Hundred and Fifty-third streets, upon which he will erect a variety theatre.

The new playhouse will be constructed of Philadelphia brick, with brownstone and limestone trimmings, and the main entrance will be on Third Avenue. The interior will be decorated in white, pink and gold, and the house will have a seating capacity of about one thousand.

Ground will be broken early in the Spring, and Mr. Shea expects the building will be completed by November. Mr. A. L. Lavenex, at present manager of Shea's Music Hall, will probably be the business manager of the new enterprise.

**Firemen's Efficiency Rewarded.** J. H. Little & Co. have sent their check for \$50 to the Fire Commissioners to be applied to the firemen's relief fund, in recognition of the prompt work done by the department at the fire in the firm's warehouse at Sixth Avenue and Fifth Avenue on the evening of December 25.

**Laurel Will Not Be a Knight.** Montreal, Jan. 5.—Wilfred Laurel, the Dominion Premier, has refused to accept the proffered honor of knighthood.

**MR. FITCH NOW FULL OF CHUCKLES.**

Tells with Glee How He Related a Story of Treasure Trove.

Made His Friend McDonald the Possessor of All the "Huzzar" Millions.

Said the Contractor Was Digging Up Old English Gold by the Basketful.

MANY BOTTLES OF WINE OPENED.

Manhattan Clubmen Excited on Being Shown What Looked Like Absolute Proof—Mayor Strong Repeats the Story.

Comptroller Fitch chuckled. It was not the laugh with which he corners the smug heads of departments who ride in carriages

at the city's expense, but the deep, self-satisfied chuckle of a man who has a good thing in good shape.

"That," he said, in answer to a question half a yard long, "is my own little joke. I wonder you did not hear the story before, for it is the talk of the clubs, and the Mayor is telling it with a straight face at City Hall."

"Who is this McDonald who is said to have found the treasure?"

"Now, look here; it's too funny to print. No? Well, I'll tell you the story as it happened, and as I told it."

"For years and years persons have been digging for the treasure lost with His Majesty's Frigate Huzzar, which left England during the Revolutionary War to pay the troops stationed in North America. She was known to have on board millions in gold coin, principally sovereigns of the reigns of George I. and George II."

"The Huzzar went ashore in Hell Gate, or opposite Ninety-seventh street, or somewhere around there, and this treasure was lost. Several companies have been organized to recover this treasure—some of them incorporated, I believe, and I don't know but they are at work yet."

"John McDonald is a member of the great contracting firm of Clark & McDonald. He built the tunnel in Baltimore, the West Shore Railroad and many other great things. He is now at work on the Jerome Park reservoir, one of the most stupendous jobs he has ever undertaken."

"We are both members of the Manhattan Club. One night he gave me a gold sovereign of the reign of George I. He said

in digging the reservoir he had unearthed the remains of a British fortification and had found a skeleton, beside which were four of these gold pieces."

The Comptroller took out his wallet and produced the coin, a thin, glittering bit of metal, fairly well preserved with the lettering and face still distinct.

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